

Fasting

Part 1: Why, What, What to Expect, and How to Prep

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Full Text (for reading on your own)

Testimony from Michelle

In early summer in 2016, shortly after Michelle moved to the Seattle area, God brought many sources (both secular and religious) into her life that talked about the importance and usefulness of fasting. After the 4th or 5th unrelated thing talking about fasting, she decided to try it. She fasted for about 40 days during the day Monday-Friday, eating and drinking nothing from when she woke up until the sun set. At first it was really difficult, especially because in Seattle the days during the summer are super long (sunrise is 5 or 6, sunset is about 9 or 10). After a few days, she says her body got more used to it, and it felt more like a spiritual workout- uncomfortable, but somehow like she was getting stronger.

Michelle found that a couple things happened when she fasted:

- She realized that she had more control over her body than she thought possible. She didn't think she would be able to not eat or drink and still function, but she did. She felt different, less focused and more reactive, but that opened up opportunities ... For instance, she began to follow impulses that she had normally ignored, like checking on a project at work out of the blue, or emailing someone she didn't normally talk to. When she wasn't fasting, she felt like she'd ignore this "noise" but in her weaker state, she followed them up. It opened up so many opportunities and connections, and many times after following one of these nudges she heard someone say it was "perfect timing." It was a constant theme!
- Michelle began to realize that those nudges were the Holy Spirit and she started trusting them more. The more she leaned in, the more God delivered. Now she said she can recognize them better, even when she's not fasting.

It wasn't all rosy though. Temptations start coming hard and fast. There was never so much delicious, free food and snacks as when she was fasting. So many birthday cakes and surprise catered meals she had to skip! People literally trying to give her free expensive fair trade chocolate bars. One tip she learned was to bring Tupperware to work and set aside any free treats for later when her fast was over. :)

Fasting also created a separation from others. When you don't eat, people wonder why. Michelle had to decide whether to hide it or not. For those she had a good rapport with like coworkers she eats with regularly, she just told them. She said she was "trying out fasting" and was surprised by people's reactions. They were curious and supportive, asking about the rules and her experience, but in no way judging or critical. That also helped with temptation- they knew not to offer her treats for a while! It was almost like she had told them she was going vegan for a bit.

Michelle didn't realize it, but fasting is actually a growing trend in the secular world for health. There's a lot of research coming out about how it might jump start rejuvenation of cells and improve health. Michelle's husband was actually the most skeptical- he felt that fasting was pointless. To make it easier for both of them, she only fasted during the week since she was at work, and ate normally on the weekends when they'd be eating together. This helped make it sustainable for the full amount of time.

Since then, Michelle's church also started preaching about fasting as part of going through a book of the Bible that mentioned it. Her pastor said he thought about skipping it since it's less popular than even tithing messages, but he went for it and challenged the church to fast with him every Thursday. I think that was last year and Michelle's been doing that most Thursdays since then.

Michelle truly believes that the ancient practice of fasting had a practical utility and that we've gotten away from it, thinking we've "outgrown" it, but that's not true. She believes that fasting has amplified her sensing of the Spirit, and has made her times of praying in the Spirit more fruitful. Since fasting, she's had exponential growth and abundance, gaining more confidence both in her spiritual life and her professional life!

Since Michelle has made fasting a regular part of her life now over the last year or so, she feels like her prayer time has been much more powerful. 4 people she's been praying for got jobs that took them to the next level in their careers. After a rough transition last year, her husband and her experienced renewal in their marriage (they decided this was our best year so far!) and will be celebrating their 10th anniversary this summer.

Why are we Fasting?

Remember this is a voluntary corporate fast - and Megan is already going to fast with me so it is officially corporate! It's NOT normal for me to be excited about fasting - but I am!

Fasting is not something I or most believers dream about. Mark Crawford says that "fasting is misnamed ... it ought to be called slowing!" As Michelle's pastor noted, fasting may less popular than teaching on tithing! You get the idea - people don't want to hear about fasting.

Let's start at Matthew 6:16-18 *"Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."*

Jesus said "WHEN" you fast ... not "IF." This same section of the sermon on the mount talks also about praying and giving. When you pray, when you give, when you fast ... Fasting is inherently part of the Christian life. It's a "when" not an "if."

That alone is enough to motivate me to fast. Jesus said to pray, so I will pray. He said to fast so I will fast. So, why am I calling this fast? First because fasting is a "WHEN" in the Christian life, not an "IF."

The next point we can glean from Matthew 6 is not do fast "outwardly." Fasting is not so that you can look pious in front of others. God is not interested in any of us putting on a show. That said, don't be crazy weird and awkward about trying to hide your fast as though you were a CIA operative who was operating under an alias! That's odd! Jesus was not saying that if someone knows your are fasting that God won't reward you; He's saying if the motivation of your heart is for people to know about your fast so they can think you are pious, then you got reward when they say nice things about you bring very religious or devoted. God is saying "if you are fasting for Me, then fast for Me." If you want the reward that actually comes from Heaven, fast for God in the secret place and He will reward you actually openly! There is no need to tell anyone that you are fasting - but then again there is also no need to awkwardly try to conceal it when you are out to eat with others.

God will reward you openly when you fast!

He's the summary of the fasting teaching:

- Fasting is a "WHEN" not an "IF."
- It brings with it a heavenly reward.
- Fasting is as simple as stopping eating for a time. We will be looking at practicals that help, but there is no need to overcomplicate how we think about the actual act of fasting. We tend to think that things we don't want to do are a lot more complicated than they actually are - so that we have excuses in our head about actually engaging with the reality of something. Fasting is actually a very simple practice that is nothing new.

In 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, Paul starts (according to his own words) foolishly boasting about his ministry. *"Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in*

*stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, **in fastings often**, in cold and nakedness - besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.”*

When we see “in hunger and thirst” it’s easy to think that is referring to fasting, but the next phrase is actually “in fasting often.” So “in hunger and thirst” probably refers to situations like being on the ship at the end of Acts without food for 14 days. So, the “hunger and thirst” would be an involuntary fasting, and therefore “in fasting often” would refer to Paul often being in VOLUNTARY FASTINGS. In fact, when Paul first was saved he didn’t eat or drink for 3 days until Ananias came, and Saul was healed of blindness and baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Not only did Jesus say fasting was a “when” and not an “if” but Paul, who wrote 2/3rds of the books of the New Testament said that he was “in fastings often.” It was a lifestyle to him!

So, fasting is an always in-season message because it is part of the Christian life-style. Additionally, in this case, there were a number of specific items that were speaking to me about the timelines of a calling a fast for the start of this year. One of which was Lou Engle (TheCall) coming to town and when he was in he gave Peter a book called “The Jesus Fast.” I had to decide “is this God or not.” Because if it was, I need to act on it. So I fasted for 3 days and during that 3 day fast, I received a spot-on prophetic word from a former student of mine for our body. The word ended with “you have asked and therefore I have come. Receive.” I asked God “when did I ask” and God said “I heard your fast.”

God hears your prayers but sometimes He hears your fast. When you fast, you instantaneously mix faith into your prayer. James said that we would see his faith by his actions. Many of us have prayed for something and not seen it come to pass. It makes you wonder - do I actually have faith for the thing I am praying for? If I had faith as a mustard seed, I would say to mountains to move and they would move ... maybe we are out of season, but why hasn’t it come to pass? I am saying “have you fasted?”

Have you fasted? There is a story in Judges 20:18-48 about breakthrough only coming by fasting. The context was that the Benjaminites had committed a very heinous murder and Israel was asking God if they should go up against the Benjaminites. God says “attack them.” Do you know what happens when they followed the Word of the Lord? They got their tails kicked! 10’s of thousands of Israelites died when they attacked the Benjaminites at the Word of the Lord! So they came back to

God and asked what to do now and God said “attack them.” Again many more Israelites died! They asked God again and God again said “attack them” but this time the Israelites fasted until evening (for a whole day). What happens now. VICTORY! They had the Word of the Lord but they had not fasted. The victory came through fasting.

How many of us have a word from the Lord in our life that we’ve not seen come to pass. We’ve believed for it and maybe even acted on it, but it has never come to pass in our life ... my question is “have you fasted for it?” Because when you fast, it puts action behind your prayers - it puts faith behind your prayers! It is nearly impossible to fast and pray about something and with the fasting not to add faith into the prayer.

Personally, I have wanted revival. I have been wanting to see that normal Christian life that turns the world upside down. It has happened many times since Acts. Charles Finney (1800’s) would come into town and entire factories would have to halt production because he would walk into the factory, a revival would break out, and nearly the whole factory would be getting saved. This was Finney’s lifestyle!

I can pray for revival, but have I put my money where my mouth is? I am putting my money where my mouth is because as soon as you put your money somewhere, your faith got somewhere! You can say that you serve God, but if your money doesn’t serve Him, then you don’t. If you put your money where your mouth is, it is a way to activate your faith! Fasting, like giving, puts faith behind your prayer.

What is Fasting?

Fasting is a physical act that is a spiritual tool that sensitizes us to the things of the Spirit!

Fasting is a physical act; remember fasting is as simple as stopping eating! Remember how Brad taught us about tithing cutting the root of mammon out from our life? When you write check and your bank account communicates with the church’s bank account according to the check you wrote for your tithe, it is a physical act ... YET it is also incredibly spiritual!

Your entire life is a teeter-totter between the things of the flesh and the things of the Spirit. We are Spirit, soul, and body. Your soul (mind, will, and emotions) and flesh want to rule the roost. Your soul is a great servant but a terrible master. We know from Galatians 5 that the works of the flesh are evident and what sort of carnality happens if you let the flesh lead. So we choose to be led by the Spirit and we are thereby transformed by the renewing of our minds. Our soul - and eventually even our body - will be transformed.

As a young believer, I would fast one day and you would think I had sacrificed my right arm for Christ! I had such a thing with food! Fasting can be very challenging initially if you’ve had a strained

relationship with food. If you have had an eating disorder, get some council before fasting, but I believe it could be a blessing for you ... but again with council. For me, I was the sort of person that would get angry if I didn't not eat food immediately when I woke up! Fasting messed with me! It's really good though because you are telling your body "you are not in charge here ... the Spirit is! My Father in Heaven told me to fast and I'm not going to eat." Fasting sensitizes you to the things of the Spirit by putting the flesh under your feet. By nature, your flesh is at enmity with the Word of God (Romans 8) - it doesn't want to do the things of the Spirit. So what do you do? You bring your flesh into subjection as a way of life by doing what God said to do - fast!

Fasting is a KEY component of learning to be Spirit-led. You can think "God's in charge in my life; I am serving God." Someone mentions "hey, why don't we fast?" and you start to groan! You said God is your supply! Fasting will functional-ize the faith that you have! Fasting is powerful.

My wife grew up around fasting so fasting has always been pretty natural to her. By contrast, I know that some people could listen to this message and be at odds with a pastor calling a corporate fast. Once fasting has become part of your Christian walk and you've experienced the power in it, you would think it is funny to second-guess fasting. But if you are new to fasting and you grew up with the "3 square meals a day - don't miss a meal" mentality that's very prevalent in America you might think "you mean ... you didn't eat today ... at all? .. really? Are you OK?" Sometimes when I've fasted you can see that people are almost trying to figure out if they should call the doctor!

Let's reason together for just a second ... what's the most important physical thing that you need? Air! You last about 3 minutes without air. What's the next? Probably water.

I don't see an example in scripture of more than 3 days without water. You might say "what about Moses?" When Moses was 40 days on Mt. Sinai it doesn't call it a "fast" - it just says he was without food and water for 40 days. In other words, I don't think God is setting that up as a prototype for fasting. Franklin Hall showed me that distinction (*New Atomic Power with God thru Prayer and Fasting*). Moses was with God - he was effectively in Heaven. Moses may have stepped out of his body. I don't know what went on there but he came back down and he shone. This was like a transfigured state and not a prototype for fasting. There are examples in the Bible of 3 days without water and Lou Engle says the same - not more than 3 days without water.

So we need air and water and the longest anyone has gone without sleep is 10 days and they nearly died. And yet throughout the Bible you see 40 days without food and there are many modern day examples of people going longer than that. The longest (medically) anyone has ever gone is 4 months. He had a gunshot wound to the abdomen and survived 4 months (roughly 120 days) without eating before he died. He did lose the vast majority of his weight and eventually died. So obviously I am not proposing any of that. I am just trying to address this "3 square meals a day"

concept and the thought that it would somehow be abusive to yourself to miss breakfast or go without food for a time. Air, water, and sleep are far more important as a day-by-day necessity.

What to Expect when Fasting

Matthew 17:21 says *“However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”* As Brad taught us, you can see from context that “this kind” wasn’t referring to the demon in particular, but more broadly He was saying “this kind of unbelief” doesn’t go out except by prayer and fasting. Of course if the unbelief goes out, the faith can work effectively and demons will leave. Additionally, healings will happen, your destiny will be fulfilled, you will step into divine opportunities, and mountains will be moved if necessary.

What I can tell you is that somehow prayer with fasting removes unbelief! Some of these things we don’t need to understand the mechanism - we just need to know that Jesus said it so just do it! So, fasting will remove unbelief so you can expect that fasting will produce breakthrough!

When I was first fasting, I thought breakthroughs were going to come that very day! I would fast and almost try to strong-arm God to answer that prayer that day. You don’t have to do that with Him! He always wants good things for you. When you choose to fast and pray, just know that you are going to get some breakthrough manifested while you pray - but a lot of the breakthrough comes on the back end of it. You don’t need to worry about God’s timing. Let God be God. You just do the part He said for you to do - pray and fast! He will take care of the breakthrough.

Also when I first learned about fasting, I somehow got it planted in my mind that it was going to be very strenuously difficult. That’s not totally true. I am sometimes much more effective day-to-day when I am fasting then when I am not fasting. Of course if you are training for a marathon, fasting would affect that. But don’t expect that you are not going to be functional or you are going to need to lay in bed all day or something like that. Again, fasting is a physical act that’s a spiritual tool that sensitizes you to the things of the Spirit - so while you are fasting you will naturally be better at many things than normal!

Let’s also look at Psalms 109:24 *“My knees are way through fasting, and my flesh is feeble from lack of fatness.”* If you’ve fasted, you know that you can feel weak at times when you are fasting. So that’s another part of it. I try to give myself grace for that - if I need to take a nap that’s fine.

Generally, I have found that on a water fast, when I start fasting I notice some head-aches ... your body is actually ridding itself of toxins. Remember the secular world is starting to take note of the medical power in fasting. Don’t let it bother you if you have some head-aches initially. That’s actually good - it’s getting stuff out of your system. And this is why it is important to drink a lot of water while fasting.

There are a few different types of fasts:

- Total fast (no food, no water). Only up to 3 days in scripture. I wouldn't recommend doing more than one or two days with that. I don't have experience with these and I tend to think it is better to flush the toxins with water.
- Water fast (only water). This is my favorite type of fast and I believe this is the main scriptural model for fasting.
- Partial fast (many variations). Michelle for example did a partial fast where she was fasting parts of the day and week and other times she ate.
- Daniel fast (more or less only vegetables and water). This is based on Daniel 1:12.

All of these types of fasting are fine. You have to have peace from God on what He's leading you to do. I personally find that a full water fast is the easiest because I don't have to think. I don't have to go buy fancy juices. I don't have to constantly be trying to not crave the juice that I'm trying to not be craving ... I'm supposed to be fasting and now juice has become the thing that I am nursing! I just like water.

How to Get Ready

Pray - ask God what He would have for you to do. I think you'll know that you've "got it" when you have peace on it and it feels like a stretch. Remember fasting is voluntary. It is a choice. There are spiritual benefits to reading the Word, praying, and fasting. You can engage with fasting if you want to.

You have to pick a plan that you have faith for. I am planning on 14 days, not 21 or 40. Megan said "you can do longer" but I don't have faith for it. 14 days feels like a stretch for me.

Have grace for yourself. If you've not fasted before, you might be able to jump right into a 14 day fast, but you might need to do a couple shorter fasts within the 14 day period. Have grace for yourself and think creatively.

If you are pregnant or nursing, you are NOT allowed to fast.

Children should not fast. If your kids wanted to fast snacks that's probably fine. But they are growing so they shouldn't fast. Teenagers (according to Lou Engle) can usually do juice and protein drinks.

If you are under a doctor's care, you need to check with your doctor before fasting. I know what the Word of God says, but if they are giving you a specific medicine that has specific interactions, you need to check with them. That said, I would not (personally) ask their "permission" to fast as much as I would ask them if there is a danger to fasting while on that medicine (for instance). Just have

them answer that question for you. Some of them may just be scared of fasting in general. You don't care what they think about fasting - just whether the medication they prescribed you could interact poorly with fasting.

I would encourage you to schedule the duration of your fast ahead of time. Fasting for an undetermined amount of time is NO fun. "Well I feel like the Lord is starting to tell me that maybe I should break the fast." "Is that You, God???"

I would encourage you to start weening from coffee now. Make sure you give yourself time during your fast for prayer.

All of this is Lord-willing. Even if you start a fast and need to break it, don't feel bad. This is not legalism. I'm your pastor who called the fast and if I need to break it for some reason, I don't need to be all condemned and stuff like that - neither do you! Again it is not legalism. You are not earning anything with God. Jesus already gave you it all. God's given us a great tool to sensitize ourselves to the things of the Spirit ... that's all it is. It's like prayer. It's an opportunity.

If you are going to do a water fast, you should switch to mostly vegetables the few days leading up to it. We are planning to start the fast on next Sunday. And again you can fast a few shorter times within this window or fast lunch each day ... whatever you feel led to do. You will notice a tremendous reward! Fasting is a "when" not an "if" and Jesus says you will receive reward openly from your Father in Heaven.